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## **ESSAY**

### **The Cultural Route to Peace and Harmony: A New Educational Initiative**

“Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind”. These words of President John Kennedy express a concern that has spanned generations.

In this context, I strongly believe that young children are innocent and impressionable. If the seeds of peace and love are sown in their minds, there would be a lasting impact on them, leading ultimately to strife-free generations.

My proposal is to introduce a mandatory course on Peace and Harmony in all schools, across nations, for students in the age group of 11-15 years. The United Nations should facilitate and ensure this introduction by all its member nations through UNESCO. This subject should be graded and be given as much importance as others, such as Mathematics and Science.

The theory could broadly outline the history of wars and the lasting damage they have caused. However, the course structure and pedagogy should be mainly practical and focus on the following:

- Students should form teams and make short films, songs, street plays and advertisements outlining the importance of peace and harmony. The videos of these projects could be uploaded on the various video sharing websites, to reach a widespread audience.
- Students should be taken to visit war-affected regions, terror spots and war monuments located in their area. The interaction with war victims, widows and orphans, as also with Army, Navy and Air Force personnel would make them realize the grief and damage caused by wars.
- “Each one befriends 21”- Each student should be instructed to make friends with twenty one children, each belonging to a different nationality, through social networking sites. At the end of each year, they should be asked to give a presentation on the learning in harmony and cultures arising from these interactions.

- The older students should be encouraged to form and participate in Model United Nations and Model International Courts of Justice. This would help them gain insights into the socio-economic and cultural situations in various representative countries.
- As part of the curriculum, enrollment in a Language Gymnasium should be made mandatory. Only when students actively learn a foreign language, will they truly be able to engage and enjoy the culture and traditions of that country.
- Students should form teams and engage in fund-raising activities for war afflicted regions.
- Essay competitions, story telling events and extempore speech contests should be organized to encourage students to voice their thoughts on peace and harmony.
- Students should also be asked to identify the quintessence of major world religions, as was done by Emperor Akbar through *Din-e-Ilahi*, to dispel myths created by fundamentalists and fanatics.

Since this course requires the students to be actively involved over a long period at an influential age, it will have a deep impact on their thoughts. Unlike cultural exchange programmes, which are not accessible to most students, this mandatory course will reach out to all students and hence have a very widespread impact.

It will reinforce Mahatma Gandhi's words, "If we are to teach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children".